



St. Augustine Orchid Society

www.staugorchidsociety.org

Orchids in Fall

October 2004

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[Orchid Growing Tips](#)

Many people have a difficult time sleeping this time of year because day length is changing so fast. Not only is the day length changing, but the sun's angle has also changed dramatically since mid-summer. This is the time to re-examine the location of plants and shading and be sure you are optimizing light. Cooler day temperatures also mean that orchids can handle higher light levels than they can in mid-summer without burning leaves. Some growers begin to remove greenhouse shading now. Windowsill growers must determine whether too much light is now entering their growing area and may have to add some shading or move their orchids just a little farther from the window, depending on the exposure.

Many orchids begin to initiate their flowering cycle as the day length decreases. Fall blooming Cattleyas, especially those with *Cattleya labiata* in their ancestry, have started to develop flowers deep in their sheaths. Many of the Cattleyas with the darkest flowers bloom in the fall. Cooler temperatures intensify pigments in some orchid flowers and begin the flowering cycle in others. Standardtype Phalaenopsis require at least a 20-degree day/night temperature change and a week or two of nights into the upper 50s or low 60s to begin the blooming process. Hobbyists growing under lights should place Phals on an outside porch or open windows for a couple of weeks in fall to initiate spikes. Small Phal seedlings should be kept warmer so that they will continue summer's growth as long as possible. They will flower later without your help and carry more flowers thanks to their larger size. Once phalaenopsis have had a couple of weeks of cool night temperatures, keep them at least 65 F at night for best growth and to prevent rots.

As days get cooler, move Cymbidiums into higher light. They can be moved into full sun if exposed to higher light levels gradually. Hybrids in this group of orchids generally like cooler fall weather and most require it to bloom well. In California, growers do not take Cymbidiums inside until nights get frosty. Similarly, many members of the *Zygopetalum* group, including intergeneric hybrids, will initiate new growths and flower spikes only when night temperatures dip into the 50s. Once new growths appear with spikes, take plants inside or into the greenhouse.

Dendrobiums are such a diverse group that hobby-ists must learn to recognize different types before following advice about inducing blooms. Many of the softleaved species and forms, including Nobile-types need cool nights, less water, and no fertilizer to flower properly. Some will lose all their leaves, while others will respond with some leaf loss and a slight shriveling of bulbs. Consult local experts or books specializing in Dendrobiums if you are unsure what type you have.

Many species of bulbophyllums are also beginning to flower. The vast majority of these come from very warm climates and will continue to require warmer temperatures if they are to flower and grow well. It can be difficult to maintain the variety of conditions necessary for a wide variety of orchids in a small growing area so compromises may lead to fewer and/or smaller flowers.

Phragmipediums, especially Phrag bessee hybrids, love cooler temperatures and will often begin new growths and grow at an increased rate in the fall. Check media to be sure



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it is fresh enough to get through the winter, as repotting most orchids in winter is not a good idea. Paphs are especially vulnerable to losing root systems during winter if the medium is already in the late stages of decay so repot any that may need repotting now.